

UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION IN DADAAB REFUGEE CAMP

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In this article, I set out to express that conflicts between cultures can reduce significantly if uncertainty is reduced. This uncertainty can be reduced by learning about different people's cultures and understanding why they behave the way they do. Individuals who learn about others way of life will be less involved in negative stereotyping, prejudices, discrimination and ethnocentrism all of which hurt successful intercultural interaction. Intercultural communication for successful integration should be a concern for all stakeholders in the education sector. School serves as an important socialization agent. It is therefore important to include Intercultural communication as a subject of study at all levels of schooling. Intercultural competence should be treated as a basic skill for all people. Uncertainty reduction by Berger and Calabrese (1975) will be used to qualify that uncertainty reduction is key to intercultural communication.

Keywords: Uncertainty Reduction, Intercultural Competence, Intercultural Communication, Stereotyping, Discrimination, Prejudice, Ethnocentrism.

Introduction

Dadaab Refugee camp houses refugees from Somalia, Congo and Ethiopia. There are also humanitarian workers from different parts of the world. This means that there is likely to be a clash of cultures. Besides the humanitarian rehabilitation, there are schools from Primary, Secondary and tertiary levels. It is therefore key to point out that at the school level, successful intercultural communication can be enabled when teachers and learners from diverse backgrounds interact. For successful intercultural interaction, communicators must realize that there are needs that necessitate intercultural communication. This paper begins by enumerating these needs, which are referred to as 'imperatives for intercultural competence.'

Imperatives for Intercultural Competence

Lustig and Koester (2006) elaborate on imperative for cultural competence as follows.

The demographic imperative for intercultural communication. The world is currently in the midst of what is perhaps the largest and most extensive wave of cultural mixing in recorded history. For example, the US population is now more than 300 million of which 66.8 per cent is European American, 14.8 percent are Latino, 1.8 percent is African American, 4.6 percent are Asian American and 1.0 percent is Native Americans. The USA is not alone in the worldwide transformation into multicultural societies throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, South American and the Middle East, there is an increasing pattern of cross-boarder movement that is both changing the distribution of people around the globe and intensifying the political and social tension that accompany such populations shifts. In Dadaab Refugee camp, you will find almost all races there: Europeans, Africans, Asians and Arabs. Besides the mix in races, they are also members of varied religions mostly Christians and Muslims. This demographic imperative requires a heightened emphasis on intercultural competence.

The technological imperative of intercultural communication. Marshall McLuhan coined the term 'global village' to describe the consequences of the mass media's ability to bring events from the far reaches of the globe into people's homes; thus shrinking the world. Today, the 'global village' is an image that is used to describe the world wide web of interconnections that modern technologies have created. Communication media such as the Internet, communication satellites and call phones virtually instantaneous links to people who

are thousands miles away. Many transportation systems contribute to the creation of the global village. The multicultural make-up of the major cities demonstrates that the movement of people from one country and culture has become commonplace.

Modern information technologies allow people throughout the world to participate in the events and lives of people in other places. Many world events are experienced almost instantaneously and are no longer separated from us in time and spaces. These increased contacts which are facilitated by recent technological developments, underscore the significant interdependence that now link people to those from other cultures. Intercultural links are reinforced by the ease with which people can now travel to other places.

Technology allows and facilitates human interactions across the globe and in real time. Such instantaneous communication has the potential to increase the amount of communication that occurs among people from different cultures, and this expansion will necessarily add to the need for greater competence. The technological imperative has increased the urgency for intercultural competence. Because of the widespread availability of technologies and long- distance transportation systems, intercultural communication competence is now as important as it has ever been. In Dadaab Refugee Camp, the refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia were a closed group with technological development; they have learned to interact with all groups of people.

The peace imperative for intercultural competence. The vision of interdependence among cultural groups throughout the world has led Robert Shutter (1990) declare that culture is the single most important global communication that humans face. The need to understand and appreciate those who differ from us has never been more important.

The incidences in Darfur, Chechnya, Zimbabwe, Central Asia, Indonesia, Middle East, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Iraq and Syria show that cultures have clashed over the right to control resources and ideologies. Likewise, the frequency of hate crimes rose dramatically. In 2002, there were almost four thousand hate crimes committed against because of their race, culture, religion or social group membership. As Stimpson has said of these ‘culture clashes,’

...the refusal to live peacefully in pluralistic societies (has been) one of the bloodiest problems; nationally and internationally- of the 20th century. No wizard, no fairy godmother is going to make this problem disappear. And I retain a pluralistic, stubborn, utopian hope that people can talk about, through, across and around their differences and that these exchanges will help us live together justly. (Stimpson, 1994)

Kenya has always received attacks from self-confessed jihadists. They claim to be fighting for and protecting their religion. The country has hosted refugees from many countries for ages: Rwandese, Burundians, Congolese, and South Sudanese. All these groups have coexisted peacefully with Kenyans due to their perceived commonality of religion and other elements of culture. The trouble has been with Somalis due to the religious gap between them, Kenyans and the government that sponsor the humanitarian programme that run at Dadaab refugee camp. The differences and lack of understanding had always caused animosity and suspicion. These hence called for concerted efforts to engage in intercultural communication peacefully.

The interpersonal imperative for intercultural competence. The demographic, technological, economic and peace imperatives all combine to create a world in which human interactions are dominated by culture, cultural differences, and the ability of humans to understand and interact within multiple frameworks.

These are some obvious consequences to maintaining competent interpersonal relationships in intercultural world. Such relationships will inevitably introduce doubt about others’ expectations and will reduce the certainty that specific behaviours, routines and rituals mean the same things to everyone cultural mixing implies that people will not always feel

completely comfortable as they attempt to communicate in another language or as they try to talk with individuals who are not proficient in theirs. Their sense of 'rights' and 'wrongs' will be threatened when challenged by the actions of those with an alternative cultural framework. These consequences of failing to create a harmonious intercultural society include: human suffering, hatred passed on from generation to another, disruptions in people's lives and unnecessary conflicts that sap people's creative talents and energies and that siphon off scarce resources from other important societal needs.

Competence and Inter-cultural Communication

Cultural interpersonal communication is a worthy and often elusive goal. Interpersonal competence in intercultural interactions is an even more difficult objective to achieve, because cultural differences create dissimilar meanings and expectations that require even greater levels of communication skills. Spitzberg (1988) provides the following definition of communication competence:

Competent communication is interaction that is perceived as effective in fulfilling certain rewarding objectives in a way that is also appropriate to the context in which the illustrations occur.

This definition provides guidance for understanding communicative and intercultural competence in several ways. A key word is 'perceived' because it means that competence is best determined by the people who are interacting with each other. In other words, communicative competence is a social judgment about how well a person interacts with others. That competence involves social perception suggests that it will always be specific to the context and interpersonal relationship within which it occurs. Therefore, whereas judgments of competence are influenced by an assessment of an individual's personal characteristics they cannot wholly determine them, because competence involves an interaction between people.

Competent interpersonal communication results in behaviours that are regarded as appropriate. That is, the actions of the communicators fit the expectations and demands of the situation. Appropriate communication means that people use the symbols they are expected to use in a given context.

Competent interpersonal communication also result in behaviours that are effective in achieving desired personal outcomes satisfaction in a relationship or the accomplishment of a specific task related goal is an example of an outcome. People might want to achieve through their communication with others.

Thus, communication competence is a social judgment that people make about others. The judgment depends on the context, the relationship between the interactants; the goals or objectives that the interactants want to achieve, and the specific verbal and non-verbal messages that are used to accomplish these goals.

This paper explores a region where intercultural competence lacked but has gradually developed. Before, different people from the cultures represented in Dadaab treated each other with suspicion, there was high uncertainty. Even though the uncertainty still exists, it's reduced through co-operation of the cultures in education, business, humanitarian aid programmes, employment and social interactions.

Cultural Identity and Cultural Biases

Successful intercultural communication fails when there is deep cultural identity and cultural biases. This section outlines these two concepts.

Cultural identity. As part of socialization, children learn to view themselves as members of a particular group. Children in all cultures, for example, are taught to identify with their families as a child becomes a teenager, and then an adult, the development of vocational and

avocational interests creates new groups with which to identify. Another feature of socialization is that people are taught about groups to which they do not belong, and they often learn that certain groups should be avoided. This tendency to identify as a member of some groups called in-groups and to distinguish these in groups from out groups is so prevalent in human thinking that it has been described as a universal human tendency. (Brewer & Campbell, 1996, in Lustig & Koester, 2006).

Cultural identities are central to a person's sense of self like gender and race. One's culture is more 'basic' because it is broadly influential and is linked to a great number of other aspects of one's self concept. These core aspects of one's identity are likely to be important in most of their interaction with others.

Because cultural identities are dynamic, one's cultural identity exists within a changing social context. Consequently, the identity is not static, fixed and enduring; rather, it is dynamic and changes with one's ongoing life experiences. In even a brief encounter with people whose cultural backgrounds differ from one's own, their sense of who they are at that instance may well be altered at least in some small ways. Over time, as you adapt to various intercultural challenges, your cultural identity may be transformed into one that is substantially different from what is used to be (Koester & Lustig, 2006).

Given our increasingly multicultural world, in which people from many cultures exist, the multifaceted characteristics of cultural identity become more important. For example, inhabitants of Dadaab Refugee camp can view themselves as workers, donor aid agents and students, Muslims, Christians among other identities.

Cultural biases. Culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms and social practices that affect the behaviour of a relatively large group of people. Culture really exists in the minds of people, but that the consequences of culture - the shared interpretations-can be seen in people's communication behaviours. Shared interpretations provide guidelines about how people should behave and they indicate what to expect from interactions with others. In other words, a culture's shared interpretations create predictability and stability in people's lives. Cultural similarity allows people to reduce uncertainties and to know what to expect when interacting with others. This is highly recommended for Dadaab's case.

Intercultural communication means that people are interacting with at least one culturally different person. Consequently, the sense of security, comfort and predictability that characterizes communication with culturally similar people is lost. The greater the degree of inter-cultureness, the greater the loss of predictability and certainty. Assurance about the accuracy of interpretations of verbal and non-verbal messages are lost.

Terms that are often used when communicating with culturally different people include: 'unknown, unpredictable, ambiguous, weird, mysterious, unexplained, exotic, unusual, unfamiliar, curious, novel, odd, outlandish and strange.' A number of situations heighten the perception of threat among members of different cultural groups. Following is an exploration of how people make sense of information about others as they categorize or classify others in their social world (Koester & Lustig, 2006).

The first is *ethnocentrism*. This is the notion that the beliefs, values, norms and practices of one's own culture are superior to those of others. All cultures teach their members the 'preferred' ways to respond to the world, which are often labeled as 'natural or appropriate'. This people generally perceive their own experiences, which are shaped by their own cultural forces as human and unusual. Muslims in Dadaab, who are also Somali in origin, have been taught that it is the only right way and hence easily label Christians as 'Pagans' who deserve to be killed. Christians also brand Muslims as terrorists. These counter prejudgments have for a long time caused a rift between two dominant religions in the region.

Cultures also train their members to use these categories for their own cultural experiences when judging the experience of people from other cultures. Our culture tells us that the way we were taught to behave is 'correct and right'. William G. Sumner, who first introduced the concept of 'ethnocentrism', defined it as 'the view of things in which one's own group is the centre of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. (Spencer and Fein, 1997)

Ethnocentrism is a learned belief in cultural superiority. Because cultures teach people what the world is 'really like' and what is 'good', people consequently believe that the values of their culture are natural and correct. Thus, people from other cultures who do things differently are wrong. When combined with the natural human tendency to refer what is typically experienced ethnocentrism produces emotional reactions to cultural differences that reduce people's willingness to understand disparaged cultural messages.

Ethnocentrism tends to highlight and exaggerate cultural beliefs. The following are glaring differences among people living in Dadaab Refugee Camp:

1. While there is mixing of members of different sexes freely among non-Muslims, Muslims scorn that as immoral and do not even share a venue at the place of worship.
2. While non-Muslim women dress as they wish, Muslim women adhere to a strict religious dress code. The muslim practice on dressing is seen to influence how some non-Muslims dress. Some have also started to cover themselves completely in order to fit in the environment in which they serve.
3. While non-Muslims take alcohol, Muslims do not. This has caused a lot of misunderstanding between the two groups.

To be a competent intercultural communicator, you must realize that you typically use the categories of your own culture to judge and interpret the behaviours of those who are culturally different from you. You must also be aware of your own emotional reaction to the sights, sounds, smells and variations in message systems that you encounter when communicating with people from other cultures. The competent intercultural communicator does not necessarily suppress negative feelings but acknowledges their existence and seeks to minimize their effect on her or his communication.

The second aspect is **stereotyping**. Journalist Walter Lipmann introduced the term 'stereotyping' in 1922 to refer to a selection process that is used to organize and simplify perceptions of others. (Stereotypes are a form of generalizations about some group of people. When people stereotype others, they take a category of people and take a category of people and make assertions about the characteristics of all people who belong to that category. The consequences of stereotyping is that the vast degree of differences that exist in the interpretation of messages.

Stereotypes start by outgroup category - 'they' - whose characteristics differ from those in one's own social group. Next, the perceived dissimilarities between the groups are enlarged and accentuated thereby creating differences that are clearer and more distinct. By making sharper and more pronounced boundaries between the groups, it becomes more difficult for the individuals to move from one group to another. Concurrently, an evaluative component is introduced whereby the characteristics of the outgroup are negatively judged; that is, the outgroup is regarded as wrong, inferior, or stigmatized as a result of given characteristics are attributed to all people who belong to the group so that a specific person is not a unique individual but as a typical member of a category.

Categories that are used to form stereotypes about groups of people can vary widely (regions, countries, cities, cultures, races, religions, age, occupation, physical characteristics, gender, and social class). Stereotypes can be very inaccurate (Judd & Park, 1993). This inaccuracy can lead to errors in interpretations and expectations about the behaviour of others.

Interpretation errors occur because stereotypes are used not only to categorize specific individuals and events but also to judge them. That is, one potentially harmful consequence of stereotypes is that they provide inaccurate labels for a group of people, which are then used to interpret subsequent ambiguous events and experiences involving members of these groups.

Because stereotypes are sometimes applied indiscriminately to members of a particular culture or social group, they can also lead to errors in one's expectation about the future behaviour of others. Stereotypes provide the bases for estimating, often inaccurately what members of the stereotypes group are likely to do. Most disturbingly, stereotypes will likely persist even when members of the stereotyped group repeatedly behave in ways that disconfirm them (Seta & Seta, 1993).

The process underlying stereotyping is absolutely essential for human beings to function. Some categorization is necessary and normal. Indeed, there is survival value in the ability to make accurate generalizations about others, and stereotypes function as mental 'energy-saving-devices' to help make those generalizations efficiently (Mcrae, 2011). However, stereotypes may also promote prejudice and discrimination toward members of cultures other than one's own. Intercultural competence requires an ability to move beyond stereotypes and to respond to the individual. Previous experiences should be used only as guidelines or suggested interpretations rather than as hard and fast categories. Judee Burgon, Charles Berger and Vincent Waldron suggest that mindfulness –that is paying conscious attention to the natural and basis of one's stereotypes can help reduce stereotype inaccuracies and thereby decreasing intercultural misunderstandings (Burgon, Burger & Waldron, 2000).

Another barrier to successful intercultural communication is *prejudice*. Prejudice refers to negative attitudes toward other people that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes. Prejudiced attitudes include irrational feelings of dislike and even hatred for certain groups, biased perceptions and beliefs about the group member that are not based on direct experiences and firsthand knowledge, and a readiness to behave in negative and unjust ways towards members of the group. Prejudiced people ignore evidence that is inconsistent with their biased viewpoint or they distort the evidence to fit their prejudices.

Prejudices serve certain functions. Lustig and Koester (2006) discuss the following as functions of prejudices:

1. Prejudice satisfies utilitarian function. Displaying certain kinds of prejudices means that people receive rewards and avoid punishments. For example, if you express prejudicial statements about certain people, other people may like you more. It is also easier to simply dislike and be prejudicial toward members of other groups because they can then be dismissed without going through the effort necessary to adjust them.
2. Ego- defensive function: This protects self- esteem as is observed by Lapinski and Boste, 2001). If others say or do things that are inconsistent with the images we hold of ourselves, our sense of self may be deeply threatened, and we may try to maintain our self-esteem by scorning the sources of the message.
3. Value expressive function: If people believe that their group has certain qualities that are unique, valuable, good or in some way special, their prejudicial attitudes towards others is a way of expressing those values.
4. Knowledge function: There are prejudicial attitudes that people hold because of their need to have the world organized and boxed into categories. The rigid application of categories and the prejudicial attitudes assigned to certain behaviour and beliefs provide security and increase predictability.

Discrimination is yet another problem of intercultural communication. Whereas prejudice refers to people's attitudes or mental representations, the term discrimination refers to the

behavioural manifestation of that prejudices. This discrimination can be thought of as prejudice ‘in action.’

Discrimination can occur in many forms. From the extremes of segregation and apartheid to biasness in the availability of housing, employment, education, economic resources, personal safety and legal protection; discrimination represents unequal treatment of certain individuals solely because of their membership in a particular group.

Tevin Van Dijk notes that ‘when individuals make prejudicial comments, tell jokes that belittle and dehumanize others, and share negative stereotypes about others, they are establishing and legitimizing the existence of their prejudices and laying the ‘communication groundwork’ that will make it acceptable for people to perform discriminatory acts.’ (Van Dijk, 1987)

Often, biases and displays of discrimination are motivated not by direct hostility toward some other group but merely by a strong preference for, and loyalty to one’s own culture.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory: Improving Intercultural Relationships

Communication theorist William Gudykunst (1995,1998,2005) stresses that the primary characteristics of relationships in intercultural adaptation is ambiguity. Reducing anxiety and seeking information, a process known as Uncertainty Reduction, can reach the goal of effective intercultural communication. There are several kinds of uncertainty. Predictive uncertainty is the inability to predict what someone will say or do. We all know how important it is to be relatively sure how people will respond to us. Explanatory uncertainty is the inability to explain why people behave as they do. In any interpretation, it is not important only to predict how someone will behave but also to explain why the person behaves in a particular way (Nakayama and Martin, 2010).

Competent interpersonal relationships among people from different cultures do not happen by accident. They occur as a result of the knowledge and perceptions people have about one another, their motivations to engage in meaningful interactions and their ability to communicate in ways that are regarded as appropriate and effective. To improve these interpersonal relationships, then, it is necessary to learn about cultures and thereby reduce anxiety and uncertainty about people from other cultures, to share oneself with those people, and to handle the inevitable differences in perceptions and expectations that will occur.

This paper uses Uncertainty Reduction Theory to qualify that when uncertainties about the other group are reduced, people get along and conflicts, prejudices and doubts are consequently reduced.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) maintain that ‘communication behaviour is one vehicle through which such predictions and explanations are themselves formulated. Individuals have the ability to decrease uncertainty by establishing predictable patterns of interaction. Because of this, reducing uncertainty can help foster the development of relationship. This model assumes that to communicate effectively we will gather information to help us reduce uncertainty and anxiety. The theory predicts that the most effective communicators (those who are best able to manage anxiety and explain others’ behaviours):

1. Have a solid self-concept and self-esteem
2. Have flexible attitudes (a tolerance for ambiguity, empathy) and behaviours
3. Are complex and flexible in their categorization of others (e.g. able to identify similarities and differences and avoid stereotypes).

The situation in which communication occurs is important in this model. The most conducive environments are informal, with support from equal representation of different groups. This model also requires that people be open to new information and recognize alternative ways to interpret information.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) found that uncertainty was related to seven other communication and relational concepts: verbal output, nonverbal warmth, information seeking, self-disclosure, reciprocity, similarity and liking. From those concepts, the researchers introduced a collection of axioms or propositions supported by past uncertainty research. Each axiom states a relationship between a communication concept and uncertainty. From this basis of axioms, the theorists were able to use deductive logic to infer twenty-one theorems that comprise the theory of Uncertainty Reduction (West & Turner, 2000).

Axioms and Theorems of Uncertainty Reduction Theory

1. Given the high level of uncertainty present at the onset of the entry phase, as the amount of verbal communication between stranger's increases, the level of uncertainty for each interaction in the relationships will decrease. As uncertainty is further reduced, the amount of verbal interaction will increase.
2. As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels will decrease in an initial interaction situation. In addition, decreases in uncertainty level will cause increases in nonverbal affiliative expressiveness.
3. High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information seeking behaviour. As uncertainty levels decline, information seeking behaviour decreases.
4. High levels of uncertainty in a relationship cause decreases in the intimacy level of communication content. Low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy.
5. High levels of uncertainty produce high rates of reciprocity. Low levels of uncertainty produce low reciprocity rates.
6. Similarities between persons reduce uncertainty while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainty.
7. Increase in uncertainty levels produce decreases in liking, decreases in uncertainty level produce increases in liking.

Central to Uncertainty Reduction Theory is the supposition that in initial interactions, individuals' primary concern is to decrease uncertainty and increase predictability regarding the behaviour of the self and the communicative partner. Individuals must be able to engage in proactive and retroactive strategies to learn how to predict what will happen and also explain what has already happened. Heath and Bryant (2000) state that uncertainty reduction theory is a powerful explanation for communication because it operates in all contexts to help explain why people communicate as they do.

Both individuals and cultures can differ in their need to reduce uncertainty and in the extent to which they can tolerate ambiguity and therefore in the means, they select to adapt to the world. The humans need to learn about others, to make sense of their actions and to understand their beliefs, values and behaviours has been generally studied under the general label of uncertainty reduction theory (Guererio & Afifi, 2000). This theory explains the likelihood that people will seek additional information about one another.

William B. Gudykunst (1996) has recently revised uncertainty reduction theory and renamed it anxiety/ uncertainty management theory. It now focuses more clearly on intercultural communication, incorporates the emotional or motivational component of intercultural competence, and emphasizes ways to cope with or manage the inherent tensions and anxieties that inevitably occur in many intercultural encounters.

To behave both appropriately and effectively in an intercultural encounter, one must make an accurate assessment about many kinds of information. The individual characteristics of the person with whom you contact; the social episodes that are typical of the particular setting and occasion, the specific roles that are being played within the episode, the rules of interaction that govern what people can say and do to the setting of context within which the interaction occurs, and the cultural patterns that influence what is regarded as appropriate and effective.

Conclusion

In Dadaab, there are many communities living there; as such, there are also various cultures. For effective intercultural communication and resultant peaceful coexistence, there must be conscious efforts from all people living there to reduce uncertainty and hence increase interaction. This will help to do away with the negative stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination that are presently exhibited. Education is a key factor in reducing uncertainties as people from different cultures reduce uncertainties about other people. Therefore Intercultural Communication should be factored into the Kenyan curriculum to reduce several prejudices and enhance peaceful coexistence among all communities living in Dadaab and Kenya as a whole.

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